

This philosophy would call for a stop to the possible fragmentation of medical care and the employment of allied skills in excess of their true worth. It would also call for a recognition by all groups involved of the skills possessed by each and the cooperation of all worthwhile groups for the ultimate and maximum good of the patient.

Since the physician is vested with final and complete authority in the field of health care, he should assume the leadership in accomplishing these objectives. He must recognize and respect the talents and the contributions which others may make for the benefit of the patient. In turn, he may reasonably expect the others to show this same recognition for his talents and responsibilities.

While the recommendations of this committee are necessarily couched in general terms, they may be boiled down to a few specifics. In short, they call for recognition, study, training, utilization and cooperation by all professional and technical groups. They ask that a program be undertaken to reach these goals and that the medical profession take the lead in this program.

Obviously, a plan of this type constitutes long-range planning which may well be beset by innumerable difficulties. What is hoped for is a gradual meeting of the minds between all these health professions, aimed at the better care of patients. If, in the process, some groups emerge as worthless or as overlapping into other fields, some changes may occur in the recognition and training of such groups. If mergers between contiguous groups are indicated, such mergers could be accomplished for the good of the patient.

The facts that three years have gone into this preliminary study and that more than 150 representatives of allied health groups were consulted in the process indicate the scope of the problem, as well as pointing to the long-range nature of the program envisaged by this committee.

For a provocative and timely report on the elements of the best in medical care for all the people, this scholarly study is recommended reading. Fortunately, the Board of Trustees of the A.M.A. plans to keep this committee and its subject matter alive and active.

## *Letters to the Editor...*

### **The Malignant Effect of Premature, Mass Publicity Concerning Factors Causing Malignant Disease**

THINGS LIKE last year's nationwide publicity concerning cranberries and stilbestrol-fed chickens and the continuing controversy concerning the carcinogenic effect of cigarettes are rapidly changing the United States into a nation of frightened people, many of them ridden by tyrannical—and to a large extent unjustifiable—anxiety and fear. These two emotions per se will shorten the lives of millions and very likely actually kill thousands. Every clinician knows that fear and anxiety increase the incidence of cerebrovascular accidents and aggravate a host of otherwise reasonably well-compensated organic illnesses.

The wise physician does not tell his patient everything—certainly not *all* the technical truths concerning for example, a rise of blood pressure, since to do so would aggravate a condition he is seeking to alleviate.

Just as an individual may request complete candor and the total truth from his physician, so may a curious and enlightened public. However, in some circumstances truth and candor, despite the request are not really wanted at all, for no one wishes to have knowledge that can only lead to a feeling of

hopelessness. So even in the case of the most serious and desperate clinical conditions the patient is entitled to receive a prognosis which includes the element of hope, and the best thinkers are agreed that this soul-saving loophole must be presented to the sick, the troubled and even the dying. This dictum, far from being hypocritical or dishonest, embodies in it the very essence of the physician's credo, since it is not only his duty to prolong life, but also to alleviate human misery.

In a way, the public, which by and large receives medical information from newspapers, magazines, radio and television, is a captive audience. If the source of medical information bears the authenticity emanating from authoritative figures, it will create a profound effect in the minds and feelings of the recipients. A trusting child will accept almost any idea from a conscientious and loving father. The child is not only incapable of being judgmental, but does not wish to be, since he prefers to try to retain his feelings of the omnipotent and omniscient parent. The public who are exposed to medical propaganda, although they be adult, usually feel, and have a right to feel, very much the same way about their nation's medical leaders.

There is no question that there are often unavoidable and legitimate differences of opinion, even

among authoritative experts. But when these differences or even diametrically opposed opinions exist, they should either be reconciled between the parties concerned or, if this be impossible, conflicting opinions should not be widely disseminated either simultaneously or separately within the span of a few weeks. To do so is to arouse confusion, dispel confidence and engender distrust in the sources of information which most people wish to regard as unassailable. Last year's questionably valid publicity about cranberries, and the even more recent and debatable scare about stilbestrol-fed chickens almost certainly will do more harm than good.

The tremendous anxiety about cigarette smoking in relation to bronchogenic and lung cancer has had a profound effect on millions of smokers for the past five years. The conflicting evidence presented in December, 1959, by the Surgeon General of the Public Health Service, Dr. Leroy Burney, and Dr. John H. Talbott of the *Journal of the American Medical Association*, leaves the public completely at a loss as to whether to start smoking, to reduce their smoking or stop smoking.

Again, let it be said that such differences of opinion are often inevitable and even desirable, but just as mother and father differ in their admonitions and ideas about restricting a child, the differences can only do the child harm if presented to him; they should be settled or suppressed without his awareness. It does not seem fair or humane to confront any human being with an anxiety-provoking dilemma, that he is quite incapable of solving.

The adult public when forced to be conversant with widely differing opinions that he is incapable of appraising, feels deserted and unprotected. These feelings in turn become complicated by fear and anger, which to a great degree could be avoided by more judicious and discriminating decisions con-

cerning the appropriateness, and particularly the timing, of information which even if noncontroversial will be difficult for many to understand and even more difficult for many more to accept without terror. We humans cannot always avoid anxiety and sometimes, even panic. But, it seems almost inexcusable to add to these burdens of human existence unless the benefits far exceed the harm.

The philosophy of medicine is just as important as the science of medicine. How comfortably people live is as important as how long they live. It has been said that if we had a choice most of us would take a shorter life relatively free from terror in preference to a longer life fraught with overpowering anxiety.

It seems to me that the best way of regulating the enunciation of medical propaganda in general, particularly information about carcinogenic agents, would be by the following plan: A committee closely affiliated with the President of the United States possibly headed by a cabinet member having to do with the health of this nation, should take the responsibility for the quality, quantity and timing of information reaching most of the population of this country. Such a committee might well be composed of the Surgeon-General of the United States Public Health Service, the editor of the *Journal of the American Medical Association*, a physician who is recognized as an expert on malignant disease, an authority on industrial medicine and at least one top-flight psychiatrist. From the accumulated wisdom of such men and the meeting of these minds, the American public would receive more accurate and less controversial reports and would thereby be spared much of the fear that now overwhelms some persons.

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